cans do not think of themselves as the "wretched of the earth," but as the salt of the earth.

Campaign methods in the United States have been on a low level, with use of every demagogic appeal that might arouse prejudice and win votes, particularly against radical and working-class candidates.

When the automobile workers nominated candidates for mayor and council of Detroit in 1937, the papers shrieked that a victory for labor's candidates would end non-partisan government, and that the issue was home rule versus a dictatorship by remote control by John L. Lewis. In the 1896 campaign, workers were told that the factory would close if Bryan were elected. In 1936 industrialists sought to rally votes for Landon by telling workers that Roosevelt's social security law was cutting their pay with no assurance that they would get their money back. The EPIC plan of Sinclair was ridiculed as the Septic plan.

Someday, perhaps, we will have a class political alignment in this country, with the masses whose small incomes are drawn from their own labor on the one side, and those who primarily own on the other. Before that can come about the A.F. of L. and the CIO will have to compose their differences, and farmers on the one hand and white-collar workers on the other will have to overcome the prejudices that divide them from industrial labor. With the growing stake of workers in government, they cannot afford to be politically inactive. For the present, the popularity of President Roosevelt will keep the masses in the Democratic Party. Should he be succeeded by a conservative in the leadership of the Democratic Party, however, a national labor or farmer-labor party might be the outcome.

THE RÔLE OF THE RADIO COMMENTATOR

By HADLEY CANTRIL

This study was made under the auspices of the Princeton Radio Project of which Dr. Paul Lazarsfeld is director, Dr. Frank Stanton and the writer associate directors. The conclusions of this study are incorporated in a volume by Dr. Lazarsfeld and Dr. Samuel A. Stouffer, "Radio and the Printed Word" to be published shortly.

The distinction between the news commentator and the newscaster is an important one, not only for the radio listener and the sponsor, but also for the scientific ob-

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server of public opinion interested in analyzing the function of radio in the life of the listener. The wide appeal of both national and local commentators suggests that there are certain characteristics of their programs that serve unique psychological functions for their millions of followers. Just what all these functions are we cannot anticipate. However, certain of them seem likely to be found.

Why do people listen so faithfully to the commentator? Among the problems to analyze are the following: Does the radio commentator help build up a sustained interest in the news? Does he facilitate the selection of news, and make newspaper reading more meaningful? Does the interpretation he gives to the news help individuals relate the day's events to their own frames of reference and points of view?

In order to provide a tentative answer to these questions, a questionnaire was compiled on the basis of which interviews were made of forty-three Boake Carter listeners. The respondents were selected at random and were interviewed over a period of five days. The days were so chosen that each followed an evening broadcast by Boake Carter. All respondents lived in the metropolitan areas of New York and New Jersey. Boake Carter was selected as the commentator for the study since he was well known for his forthright expressions of personal opinion.[1]

This study is obviously not meant to be an exhaustive analysis of the problem, but merely serves as an illustration of a technique, and the results may be regarded as significant hunches to be followed up on a more extensive program.

Analysis of the interviews permits several over-all generalizations regarding the function of the commentator in contemporary news broadcasting. However, the radio commentator, like almost any other social stimulus, will be likely to mean different things to different people. No one would expect that the same commentator would play the same rôle for a sophisticated as for a comparatively unsophisticated group.

In this introspective study it is possible by means of cross-tabulations to ascertain the *Zusammenhang* or relationship between several responses of the same person, and as a consequence to discover significances of a more abstract order than the naïve subject would probably be able to give in answer to a more abstract question. The first six results noted should, then, be regarded as rough generalizations that become more accurate when their interrelationship

[1] Since this study was made Carter has lost his sponsor, undoubtedly because he refused to pull his punches and thus alienated certain potential buyers.

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is analyzed in respect to different listeners.

1. *The news commentator provides an easy means of obtaining news.* When asked, "Do you find it easier to listen to news than to read it?", 72 per cent say "Yes." If the listeners are broken down into two groups according to socio-economic class, the results clearly indicate that listening to news is much easier for the lower group. (All figures in per cent.)

Do you find it easier to listen to news than to read it?

	Yes	No	Same
Higher group (45)	53	47	0
Lower group (55)	83	17	0

2. *The news given by the commentator is more personal than the news read in the newspapers.* Eighty-five per cent of all Carter's followers said that the broadcast by him "last night" seemed more intimate than the news they read in their morning papers.

As one respondent said, "I get a greater kick from listening." "Carter has a way of seeming to get right into you," reported another. One finds that a great majority of Carter's followers (87 per cent) think they would like him as a friend. This increased personalness of the broadcast does not vary significantly between socio-economic groups.

3. *The commentator's news report is regarded as accurate.* Almost all of Carter's followers, 96 per cent, believed that the broadcast they heard the night before was accurate and reliable. Furthermore, 65 per cent think, in general, that Carter gave them more inside information than they could get from their newspapers. When asked specifically about last night's broadcast, 86 per cent said that Carter had inside information that they did not get from their newspapers. When asked whether or not they think Carter had news sources not available to the newspapers, a majority answer "No." However, a considerable proportion, 35 per cent, believe that his own agents or allied personal contacts provided him with reliable material. All of the particular listeners studied said that if Carter went off the air, they would listen to some other commentator. Hence, the generalizations revealed from this analysis of one commentator could probably be carried over to any other.

4. *The commentator helps people select items which they should read in their newspapers.* When asked if they think that listening to Carter's broadcast made it easier to select items in the newspaper, 70 per cent say "Yes." Their feeling is, "Boake Carter focuses your attention on certain items in the newspaper." Or, "a newspaper has so much material that you can't possibly cover it all. Boake Carter gives you some-

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thing to look for in the paper." Or, "he picks out the most interesting news."

5. *The news commentator stimulates listeners to follow up items mentioned in the broadcast and increases general news consciousness.* Eighty-four per cent think that they are more interested in news since listening to commentators. This interest is wider than formerly, according to respondents—75 per cent say that they have become interested in a greater variety of news since the commentators came on.

The commentator seems, then, definitely to have stimulated the news consciousness of the listener and generated in him a real desire to learn more about the events that have provoked his interest. Seventy-nine per cent say that they feel they would like to know more about some of the things Carter mentions. The great majority, 86 per cent of the listeners interviewed, say they would read his newspaper column if it were in their paper. Over half of the individuals, 53 per cent, say they had looked through their newspapers to learn in more detail about something Carter has mentioned. "Mr. Carter has commentated on something which stirs up interest in it. I have often picked up the paper and read an article just because he mentioned the question."

When asked specifically about the extent to which the broadcast "last night" affected their interest in the day's newspaper, 67 per cent said their interest was definitely increased by Boake Carter's talk. Of those who had not yet read the day's newspaper, 84 per cent said they planned to look up some item mentioned by Carter last night.

6. *The commentator interprets for the listener, in a congenial way, the news items of the day.* Most of Carter's listeners, 74 per cent, recognize that he interpreted the news, rather than giving straight news. "His broadcast gives us a definite slant." "The commentators present so much that newspapers don't touch on—the commentators are individualists and you get their point of view." "I like Boake Carter because he doesn't care what he says. He has less restraint than any of the commentators—he says just what he thinks."

Listeners in the higher socio-economic bracket detect more interpretation than those in the lower bracket.

Do you think Carter interpreted the news or gave you straight news?

	Interpreted	Straight
Higher group	63	37
Lower group	48	52

Seventy-seven per cent say they usually agree with Carter's interpretation of the news. It is interesting to notice that when the listeners are

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asked specifically about "last night's" broadcast, nearly all of those who thought that Carter interpreted the news they heard last night agreed with his interpretation.

Do you think Carter interpreted the news or gave you straight news?	*Did you agree with his interpretation?* Yes	No	No Answer
Interpreted 56	88	4	8
Straight 44	0	0	100

In a separate study made in Columbus and Syracuse in 1937, radio owners were asked whether or not they listened to Boake Carter and if they agreed with his interpretations. The results are indicated in Table I. If we combine the percentages, we find that 44.7 per cent of those who listen, agree with him, only 7.7 per cent disagree and 47.6 are not sure one way or the other.

7. *The news commentator plays a relatively more important rôle as a news source for people in the lower socio-economic scale.* This conclusion is incontestable when one analyzes the cross-tabulations. The following pattern of relationships is obtained from Table II.

a. As we have already pointed out, a greater proportion of persons in the lower socio-economic class find it easier to listen than to read.
b. The great majority of persons in the lower bracket think they learned more from "last night's" broadcast than they would have from spending the same amount of time reading the paper. The majority of those in the upper bracket, on the other hand, feel that they did not learn more.
c. A greater proportion of those in the lower bracket think that they have become more interested in news since listening to commentators.
d. A greater proportion of those in the lower bracket think that listening to Carter's broadcasts kept them better informed than if they only read the papers.

Further indirect evidence is obtained on this point when one compares the type of news in which people are interested with the importance of the commentator's broadcasts. People who are more interested in local than in national or foreign news rely more on the commentator; people more interested in foreign than local news rely more on the newspaper. A generalized interest in world events is related to socio-economic status.

TABLE I

	Listen to B. C. both in Feb. and Mar.		*Listen to B. C. either in Feb. or Mar.*	
	Syracuse	Columbus	Syracuse	Columbus
Agree	59.5	41.5	49.1	28.9
Disagree	7.3	7.5	7.9	7.9
Doubtful	33.2	51.0	43.0	63.2
Total number	123	53	63	215

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What news interests you most		*Learned more news from Carter "last night" than would have reading paper*		
		Yes	No	Same
Foreign	34	39	61	0
National	36	42	58	0
Local	30	63	37	0

TABLE II

	Socio-Economic Status	
	Higher	Lower
Do you find it easier to listen than to read?		
Yes	53	83
No	47	17
Do you think you learned more news listening to Carter "last night" than you would if you spent the same amount of time reading the paper?		
Yes	26	70
No	74	30
Do you think you are more interested in news since listening to commentators?		
Yes	79	87
No	21	13
Do you think that listening regularly to Carter's broadcast keeps you better informed than if you only read papers?		
Yes	53	47
No	78	22

TABLE III

	Easier to listen to news than to read it?	
	Yes	No
Did the news you heard from Carter "last night" seem more intimate and personal than the news you read this morning?		
Yes	90	75
No	10	25
Do you think you learned more listening to Carter "last night" than you would if you had spent the same amount of time reading the newspaper?		
Yes	55	33
No	45	67
Do you think that listening to Carter's broadcast keeps you better informed regarding news than if you only read the newspapers?		
Yes	74	50
No	26	50
Do you think that listening to Carter's broadcast makes it easier for you to select important items in your newspapers?		
Yes	65	50
No	35	50
Does Carter give you more inside information than you can get from your own papers?		
Yes	71	42
No	29	58

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Table III compares several answers regarding the influence of commentators with the question concerning the ease of listening. It is difficult to know in these relationships which is cause and which is effect. However, it is important to see that there *is* a relationship among these apparently unrelated items. Mere "ease of listening" when reported by a respondent is doubtless a broad term meaning a variety of things to him and perhaps different things to different respondents. Since those in the lower bracket find listening especially easy, the following relationships indicate again the relatively greater importance of news commentators to these people.

Those for whom listening is easier than reading:

a. Believe the news is more personal when broadcast than do those who find listening no easier.

b. Believe they learn more and keep better informed by listening to the commentator than if they read the paper.

c. Are helped more than others in selecting news items in the paper.

d. Think that Carter has some inside information not contained in the papers.

8. *The essential difference between the news commentator and the straight newscaster is that the commentator interprets the news, thereby helping people to give meaning to the scattered news items of the day.* There are at least three psychological functions that these interpretations of the commentators perform for the listener. These functions will probably vary according to the degree of sophistication of the listener.

a. The commentator, like the columnist or editor, provides standards of judgment for those listeners who lack them. "Boake Carter explains things—newspapers just print them." It is probably for this reason that 33 per cent said that there were some types of news that Carter broadcast that interested them on the radio, but that would probably not interest them if they had to read them in the paper. Eighty per cent of these reports were in the low socio-economic class. This function of the commentator in providing the listener with a definite frame of reference is, no doubt, especially important when meanings are needed for events that are far removed from the everyday life of the average listener. For example, one respondent said, "The importance of the Chaco settlement would not have occurred to me if Boake Carter had not brought it out."

These standards of judgment are not merely specific to such events as the Chamberlain dispute; if the listener tunes in to his favorite commentator week after week, or month after month, he undoubtedly builds up a more generalized set of values

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that provide him with more basic standards of judgment which will later help him to interpret specific occurrences.

It has been shown that the commentator is primarily relied upon by people in the lower socio-economic bracket as a source of news. Since the degree of education so closely follows economic status, the frames of reference of persons in the lower bracket are undoubtedly less inclusive and less relevant to world news events than those of more sophisticated people. Much of the news for them is, then, lacking in significance. The commentator gives it the significance necessary to make it meaningful. And he does this in a way that is easy for them—by telling them and not making them read it.

b. Even when people do acquire certain standards of judgment, it is difficult for them to relate all of the great variety of news coming to them from different communication channels to these standards of judgment. Such people tend to listen to a commentator whose point of view resembles their own. His function for them is to provide specific rationalizations that may be readily incorporated into pre-existing frames of reference. One listener expressed it this way, "I like to have Boake Carter tell me what F. D. R. is up to now."

When Carter's attitudes regarding a specific issue are equivocal to the listener, it is significant to notice that the listener tends to think that Carter believes the same way he, the listener, does. Our respondents were asked to indicate which side Carter favored in Spain, and which side they, themselves, favored. Carter's own attitude toward the Spanish situation was not clear cut. He seemed to be sympathetic to the Loyalists but opposed intervention of any kind because of his general belief that this country should have no European entanglements. All of the five people who thought that Boake Carter favored the Rebels, themselves favored the Rebels. Of the 22 who thought Carter favored the Loyalists, 19 were for the Loyalists, two were for the Rebels, and one had no opinion.

This tendency to project one's own attitude into the commentator seems to continue even if the commentator's attitude is definitely opposed to one's own. When asked whom the listener thought Carter favored in the conflict between Eden and Chamberlain, of the 17 who thought Carter was for Eden, 16 were themselves in favor of Eden's policies, one in favor of Chamberlain. Of the 12 who did not know which side Carter favored, six had no opinion, and the rest were evenly divided. Carter's attitude in this controversy was less equivocal than his attitude toward Spain. He was more

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definitely in favor of Chamberlain's policy.

It should be mentioned, however, that if Carter were to disagree with his listeners on topics about which those listeners felt strongly, he would be likely to lose them as members of his audience. An occasional disagreement on something relatively aloof is, apparently, more easily tolerated.

Here again the peculiar rôle of the commentator is adapted to persons likely to be found in the lower bracket. Because of their comparative lack of knowledge or initiative in seeking information, they are more apt to let the commentator show them how their point of view can be extended to cover the sweep of events.

c. Finally we know that the news commentator who has a definite point of view is followed by some persons in the upper bracket. Many of these persons undoubtedly have already interpreted events consistent with their own frames of reference, or could easily do so. For such people the commentator provides vicarious satisfaction, and lends the comforting feeling that others may be influenced by *their* way of thinking. "I like to hear Boake Carter tell the public that we should not meddle in foreign affairs," said one respondent. "I like to hear him take pokes at the Administration," reported another.

In addition to the commentator's function of news interpreter, he seems to stand out from straight newscasters because of the personal relationship he builds up with his listeners. One tunes in to "Lowell Thomas," "Kaltenborn," "Boake Carter"—not just "the news." Not only the point of view but the personality of the speaker and how he says what he says are important factors. The personal following built up by the commentators seems to be proving a boomerang to them. They cannot attract the whole radio audience if they antagonize some of it with their "point of view" or "personality."

But news must be broadcast. If the straight news commentator does not give interpretation, he still must select his news. Selection is obviously a form of interpretation—many events must be excluded from the report. Hence news over the radio will probably continue to be most important to persons who seek aid in determining their criteria of an "important" news event and who are satisfied with surface facts and not sufficiently motivated to seek completeness or further implications.

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